



The President's Daily Brief

January 6, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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USSR-EGYPT

The Soviets have made efforts to discount the importance of both Brezhnev's health and Soviet-Egyptian frictions as factors in the postponement of the General Secretary's trip to the Middle East. We continue to believe, however, that both factors did play a role.

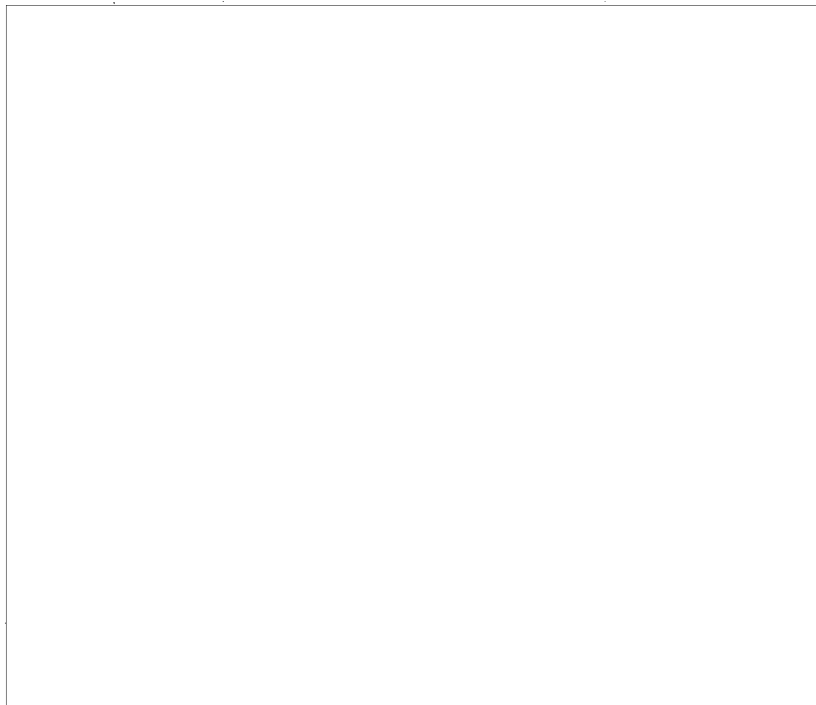
The Soviet Foreign Ministry official responsible for Near East affairs, M. D. Sytenko, expressed to Ambassador Stoessel on Friday his annoyance with Western press speculation about the postponement. He said the move should not be considered unusual. Sytenko implicitly dismissed Brezhnev's health as a factor, noting that Brezhnev had met with the Egyptian foreign and war ministers when they were in Moscow last month.

Sytenko tried to put a good face on Soviet-Egyptian relations. He vaguely asserted that the talks with the Egyptians had been positive, although he indicated that there had been no new date set for Brezhnev's visit. Sytenko stressed several times the importance Moscow assigns to the Geneva conference and suggested that a new Sinai disengagement agreement would cause "others" to become suspicious. Pravda yesterday published a commentary criticizing "so-called quiet diplomacy which suggests that the Middle East problem be solved stage by stage."

A senior Egyptian official's claim last week that the Soviets have made any new arms agreement contingent on Egyptian acceptance of the Geneva conference approach to peace negotiations underlines how far apart the two countries are on political issues. The official did relate that the Soviets have said they would deliver within three months armaments promised to the Egyptians prior to the October 1973 war.

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EGYPT-ISRAEL



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ARAB STATES - PLO

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization made only minor progress during two days of talks in Cairo. The four agreed on Saturday to meet in Damascus next month in a further attempt to iron out differences between Jordan and the PLO.

The Jordanians made a small concession to the Palestinians by agreeing to hold bilateral consultations, and both agreed to refrain from "any measures or statements that do not contribute to the development of relations between Jordan and the PLO." The Jordanians have refused to meet officially with the Palestinians ever since the fedayeen were driven out of Jordan in 1970. Amman may further put off meeting bilaterally with the PLO until the Palestinians ease their propaganda attacks on King Husayn and indicate at least some willingness to reach political compromises.

The agreement of the four to continue consultations was couched in terms of their responsibility to organize against the Israeli military threat. Their communiqué Saturday did not indicate that the Palestinians had sought to portray this threat as sufficient justification for a renewed fedayeen presence on Jordanian territory. The PLO apparently considered it unwise to jeopardize Jordan's more limited concession on bilateral talks by making an issue of the PLO's desire to return forces to Jordan.

The communiqué avoided any reference to Middle East peace negotiations.

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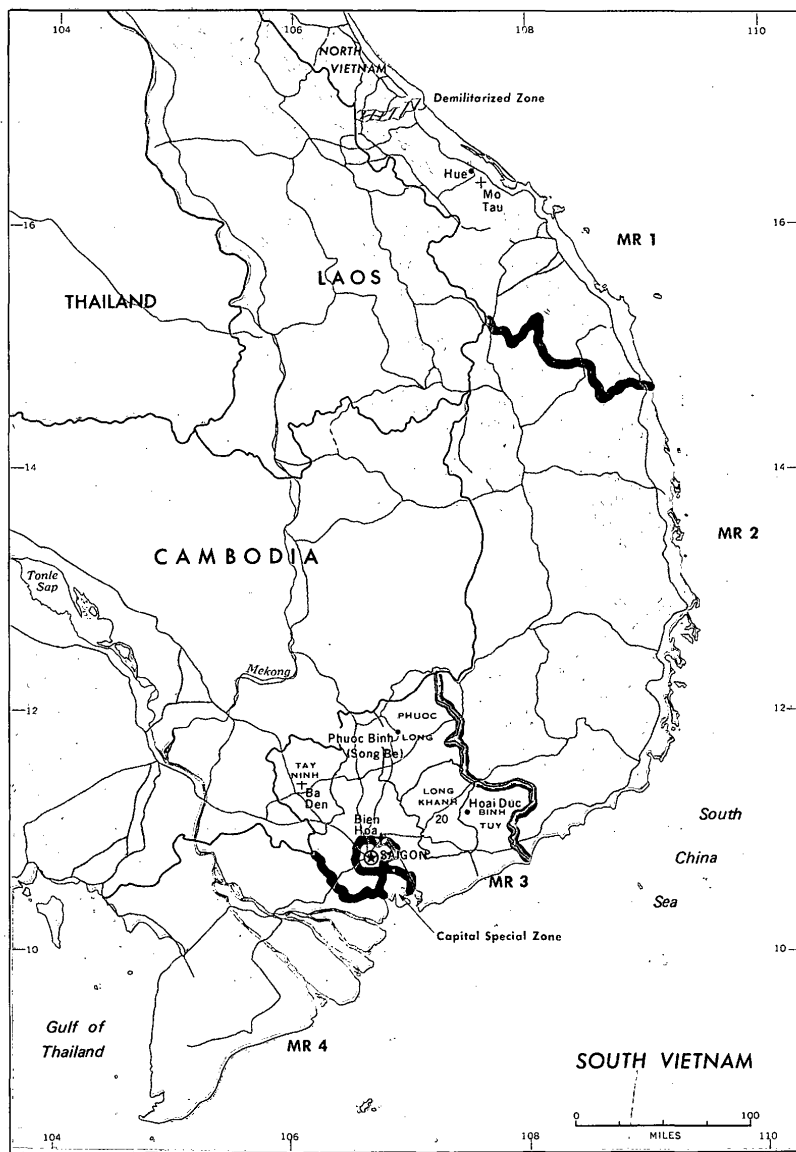
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SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese defenders at the capital of Phuoc Long Province were reinforced Saturday by a 300-man Ranger unit, but the situation is still serious.

[redacted] additional reinforcement of Phuoc Binh is not contemplated, and its defenders have been told to withdraw if their situation becomes untenable.

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Communist attacks during the past four days have made heavy use of artillery and armor. All defending artillery has been destroyed. In addition, North Vietnamese 7th Division units appear to have entered the fight--the first time they have been used in combat since the communists stepped up the fighting in early December.

The government has been able to use air strikes effectively in the Phuoc Long area, and South Vietnamese commanders believe they can provide a minimum of 60 sorties a day by using aircraft from other parts of the country.

Elsewhere in Military Region 3, North Vietnamese troops are continuing to attack Hoai Duc district capital in northern Binh Tuy Province. A South Vietnamese regiment has been sent to reinforce the local defenders and to secure strategic Route 20 in Long Khanh Province. The South Vietnamese are concerned that the communists will be able to gain control over a corridor to the seacoast.

In Tay Ninh Province, a government communications site atop Ba Den Mountain remains under siege, but additional artillery units have been brought in to support the regional force units there. Communist rocket attacks against the Bien Hoa airfield over the weekend caused minor damage. The communists will probably try to continue to fire rockets at the air base in hopes of closing the air strip to government aircraft using it to support the Phuoc Long area.

Elsewhere, fighting is light to moderate. In the delta, the number of incidents continues to drop from the record levels of early December, but still remains well above "normal." In the northern part of the country, fighting continues around Mo Tau Mountain, south of Hue, but heavy rains are hampering major military operations.

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NOTES

Moscow has yet to take a definitive public stance on the new US trade reform and Export-Import Bank legislation.

Preliminary Soviet media reaction expresses dissatisfaction with the laws' "discriminatory reservations and limitations" concerning Soviet-American trade. Soviet accounts of the bill-signing ceremonies note, however, your objections to the provisions in question. *Pravda* commentator Yury Zhukov suggested over nationwide television on Saturday that the USSR would take its business elsewhere if the US persisted in limiting credits, but he concluded that Soviet-American economic cooperation will thrive, "no matter how the enemies of detente try to hamper it."

* * *

Ethiopia seeking peaceful solution to insurgency in Eritrea Province.

The ruling military council yesterday announced substantial concessions to Eritrean tribal and religious leaders, who had presented a list of demands to government representatives in Asmara last week. The council directed its forces in Eritrea to relax security measures and to exercise maximum restraint in carrying out their duties. It agreed to review the cases of all Eritrean political prisoners, except those charged with serious criminal offenses, with a view toward granting them amnesty or reducing their sentences. The council has authorized local leaders to contact Eritrean insurgents and to convey to them the need for a peaceful solution. According to some press reports, local leaders have already begun talks with insurgent leaders on a possible truce and direct negotiations between them and the council.

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Mexican cabinet secretary responsible for oil policies ousted.

The departure of Secretary of National Properties Flores de la Pena, regarded as the most leftist member of the cabinet, will satisfy Mexican businessmen and others disenchanted with the more radically nationalistic aspects of the Echeverria administration. Flores pushed hard and often for full Mexican membership in OPEC, but the government seems to have opted for a "go-slow" approach in light of the US Trade Reform Act. The new secretary, Francisco Javier Alejo, is an economist who may have been a member of Echeverria's "kitchen cabinet."

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